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AUTHOR Ney, James W.
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ABSTRACT

Cultural factors should be taken into consideration in a bilingual education program. The cultural background of the students learning English as a second language should not be regarded as inferior. A realistic analysis of a student's language capability must be made so that his language-learning problems can be recognized and solved as much as possible. The student must be able to cope with the English used in the classroom, and teaching materials must be developed to handle these problems. Instruments of measurement must be used to determine the linguistic capability of the student. (VM)

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PREDATOR OR PEDAGOGUE?: THE TEACHER OF THE BILINGUAL CHILD

James W. Ney

The teacher of the child whose native language is not English must confront daily a child who is not only linguistically different but also culturally different. Thus the teaching situation takes on a complexity which extends far beyond the frustrating barrier of mutual linguistic unintelligibility. The dominant culture so often represented by the teacher permeates the classroom making teaching difficult for the instructor and learning well nigh impossible for the student. Just how that dominant, mainstream culture views at times the culturally different, or culturally disadvantaged child is demonstrated in Mark Twain's, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* At one point in the story, Huck is constructing a tale on how he came up the Mississippi on a steam boat. Supposedly, the boat had grounded making Huck late. At this point Huck says:

> "It warn't the grounding—that didn't keep us back but a little. We blowed out a cylinder-head."
> "Good gracious! Anybody hurt?"
> "No'm. Killed a nigger."
> "Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt." [1]

Now, I'm quite sure that Samuel Clemens was not trying to promulgate his own ideas about the status of negroes. He was merely mirroring the

[1] Mark Twain, **The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn** (New York: P. J. Collier and Son, 1912), p. 306.

Dr. James W. Ney is Associate Professor of English at Arizona State University at Tempe. He was associated formerly with the English Language Center at Michigan State University. Dr. Ney has published widely in scholarly journals and has co-authored, with S. Imamura, a series of advanced reading materials for the students of English as a second language. Dr. Ney has participated actively in professional conventions in Illinois, Nevada and Arizona.

ideas of the society about which he wrote; somehow in this society, blacks, as representatives of the culturally and linguistically different peoples, were not even accorded the status of human beings.

Among those of us involved in the process of education, it is very unlikely that the culturally different, for us, would be excluded from the race of human kind. But, nevertheless, for many of us, who through years of education have been steeped into the cultural tradition of the English speaking peoples especially through intensive study in British and American literature, subtle, more insidious and invidious forms of discrimination creep into our thinking making us predators during the times in which we should be pedagogues. For instance, in the report of the NCTE "Task Force" on *Language Programs for the Disadvantaged*, the statement is made that "without the experience of literature, the individual is denied the very dignity that makes him human."[2] (Undoubtedly, since the task force was sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English, the literature referred to is English literature if not in explicit statement yet still in actual practice.) Even the term, *culturally disadvantaged*, clearly signals that those who use the term are the possessors of "culture" and that they will maintain their superiority by dispensing this culture to those who do not have it. It probably is no exaggeration to say that every culture and sub-culture known to man has had the attitude: "No doubt, we are the people and knowledge perishes with us."[3]

Not long ago, a graduate student who is also a teacher of Mexican-American children submitted a paper to me in which she suggested that "people new to the language or culture should not be made to look any less equal than they are . . ." In another instance reported to me, a professional teacher referred to the members of a non-Anglo-Saxon segment of the community as being "disorganized." Now, what all of these statements mean, of course, is that given middle-class white American concepts of culture, members of other cultures seem "disadvantaged," "less equal" or "disorganized." Within themselves, these cultures are in no sense disorganized, less equal or disadvantaged. Most cultures known to man are quite capable of dealing with the environment in which they are found. By objective standards, such as the incidence of peptic ulcers or mental diseases among the members of the culture, some cultures are superior to the white middle class American culture.

Nevertheless, if the teacher of the bilingual student carries into his or her classroom the attitudes of the cultural group of which he or she is a member, the learning of the students can quite easily be impaired. If a child is to learn well, he must have a positive self-concept. Martin Deutsch states this quite clearly when he says that

> the self-image is vital to learning. School experiences can either reinforce invidious self-concepts acquired from the environment, or help to develop—or even induce—a negative self-concept. Conversely, they can effect positive self-feelings by providing for concrete achievements and opportunities to function with competence, although initially these experiences must be in the most limited and restricted areas.[4]

These positive school experiences are important because, as Ketcham

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[2] Muriel Crosby et al., **Language Programs for the Disadvantaged** (Champaign, Ill.: The National Council of Teachers of English, 1965), p. 222.

[3] Job 12:2.

[4] Martin Deutsch, "Some Psychological Aspects of Learning in the Disadvantaged," in John M. Beck and Richard Saxe, **Teaching the Culturally Disadvantaged Pupil** (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1965), p. 54.

and Morse have pointed out, "an improvement in children's self image and self esteem will make them easier to teach." [5]

Consider the plight of the so-called bilingual child. On the playground he is often surrounded with playmates who through their ethnocentric attitudes denigrate his cultural background and destroy whatever positive self-concept he might have. This same student goes into the classroom and that same classroom exudes the same kind of cultural ethnocentricity that the playground has. The teacher quite likely has not yet learned that as Spaulding points out "the self-concepts of elementary school children were apt to be higher and more positive in classrooms in which the teacher was 'socially integrative' and 'learner supportive.'" [6] And the results of this are tragic. Knowlton has very pointedly asserted that some Southwestern school districts "have the honor of graduating students who are functionally illiterate in two languages." [7]

If this is so, the question then arises "How can the role of the teacher be changed from that of a predator, preying upon students from a position of cultural egocentricity, to that of a pedagogue, aiding the student through learner supportive and socially integrative practices and procedures?" One possible answer to this question lies in the adoption of a truly bidimensional bilingual program, a program which requires the English speaking child to become bilingual as well as the non-English speaking child. It is bidimensional because the bilingualism moves in two directions: the English speakers learn Spanish, for instance, and the Spanish speakers learn English. The highest expression of bidimensional bilingualism is the bilingual school in which the English speakers study mathematics and the history of Latin America in Spanish and the Spanish speakers study science and the history of the USA in English. In such a program, the sociological context of the non-English speaking child is altered so that he is no longer one of the cultural have-nots; he is suddenly the possessor of a very important skill which his monolingual English speaking peers would very much like to have and which they can gain only with some difficulty. In other words, if Peter is required to learn the Spanish language and if he is expected to pursue the study of academic disciplines in that language, his attitude towards Pedro is going to be changed. To Peter, Pedro becomes a linguistic genius who can utter hard-to-pronounce sounds with the greatest of facility. Pedro is also seen as the possessor of cultural artifacts which often appear quite exotic to the culture-bound Anglo-American. Peter's attitude towards Pedro, the teacher's interest in Pedro's culture and the difficulty that Peter has in mastering Pedro's language all help to give him a more positive self-concept and a better chance to learn.

Strangely enough, opposition to bidimensional bilingual programs does not come merely from politicians, school administrators and citizens who suffer from zenophobia or similar maladies. Some descendants of foreign born Americans who have attained upward mobility through total immersion in the Anglo-American community feel that their progeny must succeed by travelling the same path even to complete denial of their cultural and linguistic heritage. Although this method of cultural and linguistic assimilation, a sink or swim method, has succeeded for some in the past, it has not necessarily been effective for large segments of the population.

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[5] Warren A. Ketcham and William C. Morse, "Dimensions of Children's Social and Psychological Development Related to School Achievement" (Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University of Michigan, Cooperative Research Project No. 1286, 1965), p. 205.

[6] Don E. Hamacheck, "What Research Tells us about the Characteristics of Good and Bad Teachers," **Human Dynamics in Psychology and Education** (New York: Allyn and Bacon, 1968), p. 190.

[7] C. S. Knowlton, "Bilingualism—A Problem or an Asset," ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 010 744, December, 1965.

There have always been those among the cultural minorities who have failed to learn English as a second language or they have learned it very badly. These have clung to their social and linguistic past because of the difficulties incumbent in the total assimilation with the help-of-heaven-and-a-long-spoon approach. There is, however, at least one other approach. Experiments such as the bidimensional bilingual program at Coral Way elementary school in Miami have demonstrated that the system of public education can help members of cultural and linguistic minorities in their struggle for acceptance in the cultural mainstream. Evidence for this assertion comes from the parents of children involved in the project. Some parents who kept their children out of the bilingual program at Coral Way for the first year insisted that their children be placed in the program during subsequent years.

But what of the school districts and systems which will not permit bidimensional bilingual programs? What can the teacher do if he or she is in a school system which is unwilling to institute a bilingual program? Teachers in such schools can always adopt a token bilingual program in the classroom as long as the teacher is master of the classroom. Pedro can be requested to introduce his English speaking fellow students to the strangeness of Spanish greeting formulas such as *buenos dias* or *adios* and to the word games and puzzles which occur in many languages such as *ere con ere sigarro*. With a little bit of ingenuity and some training, the teacher can have the class doing pattern exercises with Pedro or Juan as the informant. In fact, token bidimensional bilingualism may be the only possibility in situations where one of the two languages involved in the teaching situation does not have an extensive literature in published form. It might be rather hard to find a textbook for third graders on Navaho history written in the Navaho language for beginning students of Navaho although for the French, or Spanish, or German students there should be no such difficulty.

Teachers of the bilingual child can also help to give the non-English speaking child a more positive self-concept by acquainting themselves and their students with certain facets of the cultures which are represented by many of their students. Consider, for instance, the difference in outlook of the Anglo-American and the Indian-American.

> In the American way of life, those of us who are carried along in its social stream are future oriented. We think in terms of what is ahead. In contrast, those whose lives are governed by the values of the Indian life are oriented to the present.—"the exultation of the now." The non-Indian life is one of "conquest over nature" as against the Indian way of "harmony in nature." Another way of comparing them is to describe the former as existing in a state of anticipation, while the latter finds nothing to look forward to and feels that the essence of living is found in the present timelessness.[8]

It is impossible, of course, to say that one way of looking at life is better than another. It may be that the Indian way might lead to less mental ill-health or that the Anglo-American way leads to greater material prosperity. But until such time as an absolute standard of *good* or *bad* is established in evaluating cultural world views, teachers and students alike should treat the members of culturally different minorities with deference and thus aid them in their adjustment to the mainstream culture.

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[8] Hildegard Thompson, **Education for Cross Cultural Enrichment** (Washington, D. C.: US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1964), p. 14.

Nor should anyone forget that the first inhabitants of this land were thrifty, industrious and quite capable of living orderly lives within the time cycle that was important to them. It may be true that they have lost these characteristics after their initial contacts with certain elements of the Anglo-American culture. It certainly is true that third cultural traits have developed universally when two cultures come in contact with each other. Nevertheless, as Brody and Aberle point out, the Indian American is not going to be helped by the kind of thinking that insists that "assimilation" of Indian Americans to the Anglo-American culture "can be achieved merely through the Indians' adopting certain attitudes to their white neighbors. For example, it is said that all that is necessary is for the Indians *to be thrifty, to acquire habits of diligence,* and *to learn the importance of punctuality.* . . . Yet by the standards and needs of their own culture, the Indians historically have been economical, hard working and appreciative of time." [9] And the same might be said of the members of other sub-cultures in American society. For all of the students, the teacher, to be a true pedagogue, needs to be "integrative" and socially "supportive" from the basis of a knowledge and understanding of the native language and culture. Furthermore, an egalitarian attitude should be manifested by the teacher in all contacts with students.

One other hard-to-recognize problem forces the teacher of the bilingual child into the role of predator. This problem can most easily be labeled: *Failure to recognize the existence of a problem.* Many teachers conclude after talking with a student for a few minutes that he has no language problem. They neglect to reckon with the fact that a student's language problem may not be immediately observable. More than a few students whose native language is not English pick up "playground English" from their fellow students.[10] They then have adequate facility in the language to communicate readily with a teacher on mundane, everyday matters. But they are in no way equipped to deal with the academic English of textbooks and written compositions.* Dropout rates for some schools may, perhaps, give some indication of the truth of this proposition. For instance, the dropout rate for one school in the Phoenix area was as follows for the year 1969:

TABLE I: DROPOUT RATE BY ETHNIC GROUP

	Anglo-American	*Spanish Surname*	*Indian American*
ETHNIC GROUPING OF DROPOUTS	60%	37%	3%
ETHNIC GROUPING OF ALL STUDENTS	92%	7%	.3%

A careful reading of Table I raises questions such as the following: Why is it that although students with Spanish surnames constitute only 7% of the student body, 37% of the dropouts have Spanish surnames? Similarly, why is it that although Indian Americans made up only .3% of the student body, 3% of the dropouts are Indian Americans? Supposedly, if there were no ethnic imbalance in the dropout rate, since 92% of the students are Anglo-Americans (and others) 92% of the dropouts would be Anglo American. Similarly, if 7% of the students have Spanish surnames, only

[9] William A. Brody and Sophie D. Aberle, **The Indian: America's Unfinished Business,** (Norman, Oklahoma: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p. 5.

[10] This idea was first suggested to me by Mrs. Grace Blossom, President of the Arizona Bilingual Council, 1969.

*Cf. also R. Kaplan, "A Teacher's Guide to Connected Paragraph Construction for Advanced Level Foreign Students," pp. 50-61, below. [Note of the Editor]

7% of the dropouts should have Spanish surnames. But it is not so, and one of the reasons might be that a great number of students with Spanish surnames have second language problems.

Another way of looking at a similar set of statistics but for different schools is as follows:

TABLE II: THE RELATION OF ETHNIC GROUPING TO DROPOUT RATE

	*Anglo-American and Others**	*Spanish Surname*
Percentage of Drop Out Students		
School 1	2%	22%
School 2	8%	12%
School 3	9%	13%

Again, for each of the schools reporting, persons having Spanish surnames dropped out of high school at a greater rate than those who do not have Spanish surnames. For this group, it is quite possible that second language problems contribute to the greater dropout rate of the students having Spanish surnames.

Recognizing the existence of a problem, however, is only the first step to take towards a solution. Finding the tools to use in moving towards a solution can be an important second step. For this step, unfortunately, most teaching materials currently in use are not completely adequate. In the past decade or two, materials have been developed for the foreign students entering American universities. Furthermore, series developed for the public schools have concentrated on raising the non-native speaker of English to the linguistic level of a 12-year-old-native at best. In addition, these materials concentrate largely on oral language. Even if these texts are supplemented by series such as the Miami Linguistic Readers, the student is still not raised to a level of proficiency equivalent to that of his Anglo-American peers in the higher grades. Textbooks modelled on the Imamura-Ney *Audio Lingual Literary Series* (Ginn/Blaisdell 1969) could be used in the high schools to great advantage. These texts present a unified approach to the teaching of reading, written composition, and oral language skills. They do this for the non-native speakers of English by tying language exercises into literary texts and readings. For instance, one of the texts uses an article from the *Saturday Review* on the subject of automation. Students read the article both in and out of class and then perform exercises in pronunciation, grammar and writing together with reading comprehension, using the language patterns and forms from the article which they have just read. Similar texts to these, incorporating recent advances in the study of linguistics and psychology, could be of great help to the teacher of the non-native speaker of English in the schools.

Besides these, instruments of measurement need to be used in the public school situation to determine whether or not students are partially bilingual or whether one linguistic system is stronger than another. Wallace E. Lambert and his associates at McGill University have developed tests which identify linguistic dominance or the extent of bilingual balance. One of these tests, the word association test, measures the speed at which students associate words with cues in each of the linguistic system that they command. The rapidity with which they make associations and the number of associations that they make in either of their linguistic sys-

*In schools numbered 2 and 3, other minorities heavily influenced the dropout rate in this column.

tems gives some indication of the strength of the system. Tests like these should be used quite widely in the public schools.

So then, in the current situation, at least three areas merit the special attention of the teacher of the bilingual child. These are (1) the development of bidimensional bilingual schools and classes, (2) an increasing understanding of the non-Anglo-American cultures in this country coupled with a use of this understanding in the classroom, and (3) a recognition of the fact that students with a grasp of "playground English" cannot be expected to cope with the problems created by the use of academic English in the classroom. Materials and teaching methods must be developed to aid the student in his attempt to grapple with the kind of English used in the textbooks and by the teachers in the classroom.

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